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ABSTRACT

Judgments about competence are always relative, tentative, and situation-specific. An effective competency-based program for preparation of school administrators must base judgments about competency development on the same sources that will judge on-the-job administrative competency. The four most common instructional orientations to administrator preparation--traditional, academic, phenomenological, and performance-based--share an implicit assumption that competence can be judged by limited criteria and audiences. Regardless of philosophical orientation, the most common judge of administrator preparation is a single professor. This audience has little or no importance in judging the competence of the practitioner. Most existing programs that have been labeled performance-based education (PBE) or competency-based education (CBE) are examples of PBE. CBE may be best defined as a way of thinking about program planning. PBE is, by contrast, an instructional approach. To realize the promise of CBE demands the use of assessment criteria that involve judgments by multiple audiences. (Author/JG)

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ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS: PROBLEMS IN EVALUATING COMPETENCE

Edgar A. Kelley

A person is judged to be competent when he is able to adequately perform at the criterion levels which are identified and specified within the role he fills. Competency, like beauty, is judged by the viewer. The primary issue in providing a definition of competence, therefore, is determining the referent groups--the viewers or audiences--involved in judging whether or not an individual is competent.

Judgements about competence are always relative, tentative, and situation-specific. An individual's competence is judged by comparison of his performance with the performance of other individuals in the same or similar settings as well as by comparison of his performance to stated or specified ideal standards of performance. Judgements about an individual's competence are always tentative --there is no guarantee that a person judged competent at one point in time or within one setting will also be judged competent at a differing point in time or in a different setting. Thus, judgements about competence are also situation-specific.

Criteria for competence can be determined only by the identification and involvement of the referent groups, or audiences, which are actually and ultimately involved in determining whether or not the individual is competent. And therein lies the rub. In most academic programs for the preparation of school administrators, judgements about competence are made primarily or solely by university professors involved in the delivery of instruction. In

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the work settings faced by most school administrators, university professors are not a significant audience involved in making judgements about administrative competence.

To both develop and deliver an effective competency-based program for the preparation of school administrators, it is essential that judgements about competency development be based on the same sources which will, in all probability, be making judgements about administrative competency in on-the-job settings. This requires, at a minimum, that the major audiences involved in judging administrative competency be identified and that procedures for the collection and use of data from these audiences be developed.

A variety of audiences will be involved in making judgements about the competence of the school administrator. These audiences include, but are not limited to, the following referent groups:

--Self. The administrator's competence will be closely related to his own perceptions of whether or not he is competent.

--Supraordinates. The perceptions held by those individuals or groups which hold formal or informal role power over the administrator will have a major impact upon the determination of whether or not the administrator is perceived as being competent.

--Subordinates. The perceptions held by those who are supervised by the school administrator in their roles as employees of the organization will have a major impact in determining whether or not the administrator is competent and effective.

--Clients. For schools, the clients are pupils. Pupil perceptions regarding the effectiveness or competence of the administrator are of importance in the long-range determination of administrative competence.

--Patrons. The parents and community members, in their interactions with and reactions to the administrator, are a source of judgements about the competency of the school administrator.

--Colleagues. The individual's role peers, those in similar positions and having periodic contact with the administrator, are a source of judgement about the competence of the school administrator.

--Experts. The positions taken by professional groups, normative standards for behavior as established by law or custom, and individuals with either ascribed or earned status as experts in school administration remain major sources of evidence regarding the competence of the school administrator. [It is as a member of this audience that the professor of school administration most commonly has a role in making judgements about the competence of the school administrator.]

Both the problems and the promise of competency-based education (CBE) are closely related to the fact that competence is not a product of what the individual knows, does, or feels; instead, competence is ascribed when what a person knows, does, or feels is evaluated as being positive in its results by the audiences actually engaged in judging competence within a specific setting. In addition, competence in any meaningful sense can be ascribed only when there is "an accumulation of evidence, over time, that an individual is able to apply knowledge and perform certain functions or skills in ways which are, more often than not, perceived positively by both the individual and his audiences."[1]

At the present time, a tidal wave of enthusiasm has been witnessed in the development of competency-based education (CBE) and performance-based education (PBE). A problem of definition has haunted this movement. Many advocates of reform in preparation programs for professional educators use CBE and PBE as interchangeable terms.[2] Others have suggested, however,

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[1]Edgar A. Kelley, R. Stephen Tegarden, J. Lloyd Trump and Robert L. Larson, "Planning Preparation Programs," Chapter 2 in Continuing the Search: Preservice and Inservice Education (Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1975), 11.

[2]W. Robert Houston, "Competency Based Education," in Exploring Competency Based Education, ed. W. Robert Houston (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1974), 3-15.

that a definite distinction should be made between PBE and CBE.[3] Examination of those programs which have been labeled, on a self-nominating basis, as PBE or CBE programs suggests that the terms are being used on an interchangeable basis. The position which is taken here is that, on a conceptual basis, a distinction should be made between PBE and CBE.

Philosophical Orientations to Administrator Preparation

Probably the paramount issue in the development of systematic attention to problems of assessment and research for administrator preparation programs is the need for clear conceptual definitions of differing philosophical orientations present in the planning of preparation programs. Four instructional approaches can be delineated: (1) classical or traditional, (2) academic, (3) phenomenological, and (4) performance-based. Distinctions between these approaches can be identified by determining the kind of evidence which is used to predict the success of administrators trained in the program.

The classical or traditional administrator preparation program is based on prediction of administrative success as a function of knowledge to be gained by the prospective administrator regarding administrative practices. While observation, simulation, or other instructional procedures may be used in the classical preparation program, the nature and quality of these experiences is so eclectic and individualistic that administration becomes an idiosyncratic set of behaviors and little basis exists for ascribing subsequent administrative behaviors to characteristics of a preparation program.

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[3]Edgar A. Kelley, Three Views of Competency-Based Teacher Education: III: The University of Nebraska (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1974). Also see Cass Gentry, et. al., "For Want of an Assessment System, CBTE Programs are Lost," PBTE, 3 (September, 1974), (Multi-State Consortium on Performance-Based Teacher Education), 1-2.

The academic administrator preparation program is similar to the classical administrator preparation program. Both types of programs are based on the assumption that cognitive knowledge is the best predictor of future success as a practicing school administrator. The difference is in the nature of the knowledge to be learned. The academic orientation is based on the belief that knowledge of the broad field of professional education and, perhaps, related disciplines is the prime requisite of effective administrator preparation. Again, as is true in the classical orientation, the results are idiosyncratic; the predictability of specific types of learning required as related to future administrative success is not sought.

The phenomenological approach is based on the premise that idiosyncratic behaviors are most desired since each individual is in a process of self-actualization where the act of administration will be so unique to the individual that no common administrative characteristics can or should be defined. Supporters of this position can defend their position by reference to the generally fruitless search for standard predictors of administrative effectiveness or competence. When programs or instruction are based on the phenomenological approach, considerable emphasis is placed on personal self-exploration and on exploratory activities with others. Success is "feeling good" and helping others to "feel good."

PBE approaches to administrator preparation are based upon the specification of skills or behaviors which must be demonstrated by the learner. An assumption in each PBE program is that the skills which are specified are also essential to administrative effectiveness. The basis for the selection of specified skills to be included in PBE programs has, however, varied widely. The commonality of standards from program to program is limited to general agreement that certain skills should be demonstrated; there is no

agreement, which would permit the comparison of one program to another, regarding what those specific skills should be. In fact, as Schmieder noted about teacher education programs, the lack of commonality regarding specific skills is so great that one program may seek a behavior which is directly contradictory to that which is required in another program.[4]

Initiators and advocates of PBE approaches for administrator preparation have criticized preparation programs based on classical, academic, and phenomenological orientations charging that these programs are dependent on professional judgements and assumptions regarding the essential characteristics required for competence as a school administrator. Unfortunately, at least at the present time, the same charge may be leveled at the PBE efforts. The task of improving administrator preparation programs will be more profitably approached when there is a shared awareness, regardless of philosophical orientation, that little is to be gained by unexamined beliefs which are supported almost exclusively by mystical, romantic, and religious fervor. The paltry base provided by existing research about administrator preparation programs and administrative effectiveness means that none of us can afford to call the kettle black.

All four of the philosophical orientations which have been described --classical or traditional, academic, phenomenological, and PBE--are process-oriented, i. e., their focal concern is upon learner demonstration, in a preparation program, of attainment of required knowledge, skills, or behaviors. Each orientation is closely linked with certain preferred behaviors which are to be shown in the planning and delivery of instruction within a preparation program. Conceptually, CBE is not incompatible with any of these instructional approaches. A CBE orientation, however, is concerned with product outcomes --with results or consequences attained by the learner in his actual applica-

tion of the knowledge, skills, or behaviors learned.

From a CBE theoretical framework, the appropriateness of any instructional approach to administrator preparation can only be assessed by the determination of its value in enabling the learner to become competent with competence being judged, over time, by the actual audiences the learner is engaged with in his post-program roles as a practitioner.

Problems in Evaluating Competence

The more complex and pluralistic a phenomenon is, and the greater the variety of alternatives which are suggested or operant, the more likely it is that discussion about the phenomenon will focus upon the geometric identification of issues which cannot, in the view of one or more observers, be overlooked. The complexity of issues related to the assessment of learner growth or program effectiveness has the effect of stimulating the identification of an ever-increasing number of issues and items which cannot be overlooked. Unless critical dimensions, common to a variety of conflicting philosophical orientations concerning administration preparation, can be discovered, any efforts at improvement of administrator preparation programs and administrative effectiveness will probably be abortive.

The Current Scene. Efforts to link particular philosophical orientations to the development of administrator competence have, without notable exception, failed:

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[4]Allen A. Schmieder, Competency-Based Education: The State of the Scene (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973), 40.

1. The effectiveness of the manager cannot be predicted by the number of degrees he holds, the grades he receives in school or the formal management education programs he attends.[5]

2. Academic achievement is not a valid yardstick by which to measure leadership potential.[6]

3. Leaders must acquire through their own experience and reflection vital knowledge and skills.[7]

4. We do not have adequate evidence to justify, particularly with reference to performance criteria, typical existing state certification requirements, university division standards, or preparatory programs in educational administration.[8]

5. There is no positive relationship between formal preparation and success in professional leadership. . . "the less extensive the formal preparation of principals, the greater was their staff leadership."[9]

To the extent that specific criteria related to what the administrator must know, feel, or do can be identified, training programs could be designed and implemented which would permit the preparation of administrators at predictable levels of competence. The existing state of knowledge about effective predictors of administrative competence is so weak or non-existent that CBE approaches will remain, for the immediate future, more dream than reality. Unless and until a knowledge base can be obtained and strengthened which will permit the predictable linkage of instructional processes with the development of competence, little can be gained from debate over the "best" instructional methodology to use in planning or delivering administrator preparation programs.

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[5]Donald P. Mitchell, Leadership in Public Education Study (Washington: Academy for Educational Development, Inc., 1972), 32.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

The Need At the present time, data which would provide a solid base for linking standards for learner performance while in a preparation program to subsequent competence as demonstrated on-the-job are non-existent or inadequate. The most pressing need is for the development of careful assessment procedures which would permit the linkage of process and product. Such efforts might begin with a model for program planning similar to that which is illustrated in Figure 1 and described in subsequent paragraphs.

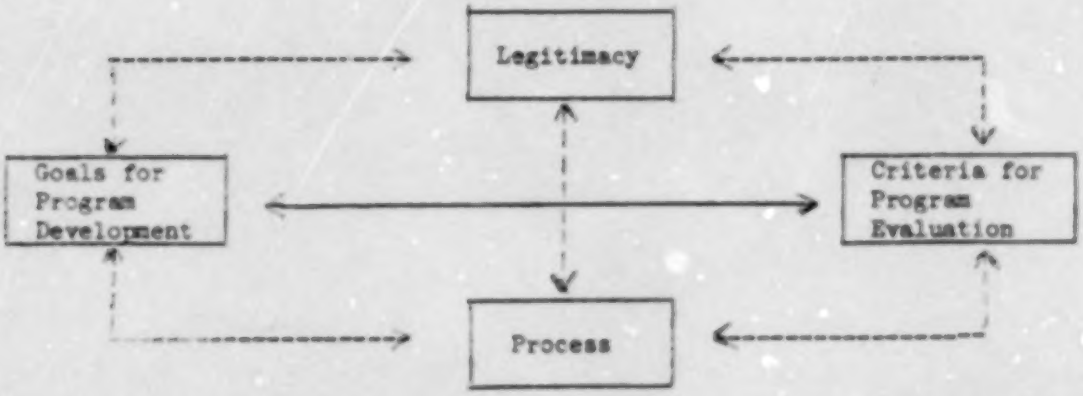

Figure 1. A Model for Program Planning

The four components of the model may be described and defined in the following manner: (1) a goal is a broad, abstract, general and non-specific statement of a desired end to be attained by learners involved in the program; (2) goals are converted into criteria for program evaluation through the specification of outcomes which are being sought, on a long-range basis, for groups of learners which have completed a preparation program; (3) process refers to any methodology, pattern of organization, set of materials, planned learning experience, course or unit of a course, and the utilization of resources--staff, time, space, money--selected and implemented in the preparation

program in the expectation that it will help to translate a goal into learning outcomes which facilitate the attainment of criteria selected for program (or learner) evaluation; and (4), the characteristic of legitimacy is dependent upon a component or the interaction between components possessing characteristics which are viewed--in a legal, moral, or professional sense--as being positive and acceptable.

Assumptions for Use in Judging Competence

Much of the recent effort directed toward the reform and improvement of administrator preparation programs has been focused upon the improvement of instruction--a process element--in training programs. In some instances, advocates of particular philosophical orientations have either implied or even explicitly stated that a particular mode of delivery is essential for effective preparation of administrators. As an illustration, much of the discussion of PBE and CBE has focused upon debate regarding the methodological approaches commonly associated with programs claiming to be organized on PBE or CBE principles. The heat which is often generated by such discussions has caused some individuals to forget that there are no spokesmen seriously arguing that plans should be made for the training of incompetent administrators.

Operating from a universal premise that administrators should be competent, the following assumptions are postulated as being of possible value for use by program planners in the development of procedures for the training or assessment of administrator competence:

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[8]Memorandum to members of the University Council for Educational Administration Certification Commission summarizing meeting of June 4-5, Columbus, Ohio, 1971. Mimeographed.

[9]Neal Gross, Staff Leadership in Public Schools, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), 61-89.

1. Judgements about competence are always relative to the standards of the specific setting and to the standards accepted and used by the audiences involved in the judgement of competence.

2. The more diverse the sources of data used for making judgements about competence, the greater the reliability of the judgement.

3. Competence in the application of specific knowledge or the use of specific skills can be ascribed as a characteristic of an individual only when multiple examples of application and use can be considered, i. e., "replication of performance at levels perceived to be successful is an essential criterion for the definition of competency."[10]

Existing programs which have been labeled as being PBE or CBE programs are, with few exceptions, examples of PBE, i. e., the emphasis in these programs has been on the behavioral specification of cognitive, affective, and performance criteria which are to be met by the learner in his completion of the preparation program. Almost exclusively, assessment and evaluation of learner performance is made by a single audience--the professor charged with supervising the student's work. Most of the program objectives required have been adopted by the use of planning approaches based on "a mixture of evidence and intuitive wisdom."[11] Assessment data are lacking which would permit the matching of these objectives for learner performance to the subsequent presence or absence of "competence" in the practitioner.

CBE may be best defined as being a way of thinking about program planning. PBE is, by contrast, an instructional approach. Other instructional approaches are, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, as theoretically capable of

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[10]Kelley, Tegarden, Trump, and Larson, op. cit., 12.

[11]Nei A. Flanders, "The Changing Base of Performance-Based Teaching," Phi Delta Kappan, LV (January, 1974), 312-315.

being competency-based as is the use of PBE approaches. CBE, regardless of the instructional format used, has the following characteristics:

1. Competence areas--knowledge, skills, functions, behaviors, attitudes--are identified and criteria are specified.

2. Multiple examples of performance are required before competence is judged to be present for the individual learner.

3. The judgement as to whether or not the individual is competent is made by the involvement of multiple audiences and includes that audience or those audiences to which the required competence is directed. [For example, if the learner is required to know a body of knowledge about principles of staff supervision, the primary audience might be an expert in that field, e. g., a college professor. If the learner is required, however, to demonstrate competence in the application of that body of knowledge, evaluative feedback from those being supervised by the individual is a requisite for making judgements about the level of attainment.]

The Promise of CBE

It is the conceptual framework implied by CBE which holds promise for meaningful change and development in the design and delivery of preparation programs for school administrators. Since data are not currently available to support the value of any single philosophical orientation toward instruction as being greater than that which is possible by use of a differing orientation, there is no evidential base for recommending that any given instructional format should be selected in preference to another. Regardless of the instructional format used, however, the following steps are necessary for the application of CBE principles:

1. Exit criteria should be specified; at present, this will need to occur, for the most part, on the basis of a mixture of evidence and professional judgement.

2. The primary and secondary audiences to be used as data sources in the judgement of competence for exit criteria must be identified. [Once identified, these audiences can also serve as a source of information for the design of program components.]

3. Students entering a program should be diagnosed by comparison of their existing knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and experiences to required exit criteria.

4. Instruction should be provided to the individual or to groups of individuals through the utilization of a variety of methodologies selected as illustrations of the intended outcomes and also selected for proven or testable utilitarian value in facilitating the accomplishment of intended outcomes.

The definition of the audience or audiences whose demands are to be met and used as measurement criteria is related to the issue of accountability. As a concept, CBE demands that prepara;tion programs demonstrate their accountability. The demand, however, does not lead to the reality just as the wish does not, without effort, become the fact. The task of specifying levels of accountability for preparation programs raises numerous questions: How is accountability to be defined for a preparation program? What are the real limits of accountability appropriate for a preparation program? Is the accountability of a preparation program for and to its students ended with the student's completion of the formal preparation program?

Accountability, in any setting, consists of the ability to deliver on promises which are made. It refers to the ability to provide a rationale for actions which are taken, the responsibility of limiting promises to criteria for which sufficient control is possible so that the individual or organization can legitimately be held to account for the outcomes obtained, and the willingness to accept responsibility for the outcomes which are actually achieved.

The accountability of administrator preparation programs should be limited to the completion of specified exit criteria with regard to individual students. Beyond this point, sufficient control is not possible so that the preparation program could or should be held accountable for the individual. For groups of individuals, however, the preparation program should be able to

identify the relationship between exit criteria and probable future competence so that predictions regarding competence can be made with a known degree of reliability and validity.

The Steps Ahead

CBE involves a willingness to seek predictive relationships between exit criteria, however they might be specified, and the subsequent judgements of competence made by any and each type of audience the practitioner interacts with. Until such relationships are known and specified, until the admission of students into preparation programs can be made on the basis of predictive possibilities of future success in both the preparation program and the profession, until programs and curricula for administrator preparation--preservice or inservice--are designed and specified so as to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses of individual students enrolled in administrator preparation programs, and until exit criteria can be related in a predictable fashion to the assessment criteria which are applied to the practitioner in subsequent professional roles and settings, CBE will remain an ideal.

The four most common instructional orientations to administrator preparation--classical or traditional, academic, phenomenological, and performance-based--share an implicit assumption that competence can be judged on single or limited categories of criteria and audiences. The classical and academic orientations, in practice, judge competence on the basis of cognitive criteria; often, the application of these criteria is made on an idiosyncratic basis by professors charged with the preparation of the school administrator. Proponents of the phenomenological approach are often reduced, in practice, to the applica-

tion of unspecified and idiosyncratic criteria or to a laissez-faire acceptance of the student's performance. Most PBE programs, as presently implemented, remain tied to assessment practices which reduce judgements about competence to decisions made primarily or solely by professors of school administration. Thus, regardless of philosophical orientation, the most common audience for judging the learner in a preparation program is a single professor whose judgements are often made on an idiosyncratic basis. This audience of professors has little or no importance in making judgements about the competence of the practitioner.

The student in a preparation program can divide and conquer the demands of his preparation program by adapting to multiple and often conflicting standards held by different individuals who serve as his professors. To do this, the learner keeps each part of the preparation program isolated and then adapts to the implicit or explicit standards he faces. This flexibility, while perhaps important, may have negative consequences when the student faces situations where he must cope with a variety of audiences and demands which may be in conflict. It is not surprising, for example, that many beginning administrators experience serious problems in coping with multiple demands from conflicting role groups; often, it is the first time that the individual has had such an experience. Yet, the professional and personal development of the individual administrator, to no small degree, will be dependent upon his ability to simultaneously interact with multiple audiences.

While the use of a single audience for assessment and evaluation of competence is a common phenomenon, there is theoretical consensus that multiple measures permit greater accuracy in the assigning of value. The promise of CBE, if it is to be realized, will demand that the application of exit criteria used to judge the competence or development of learners completing a preparation

program involves judgements made by multiple audiences. The mere restructuring of criteria within a differing instructional format--a process which has, on occasion, happened in response to the PBE bandwagon--will not guarantee the preparation of more competent administrators.

Many of the research and assessment efforts which are needed will be long-range and developmental. Existing technology may be inappropriate; few assessment models are available for conceptualizing and addressing the total task; and, an emphasis on daily program operational needs often takes precedence over the need for careful collection and analysis of data. Thus far, the results have been no data at all or data which are so fragmented and obviously self-serving as to be highly suspect.

It may well be that the task of linking the multiple variables involved in a preparation program with the subsequent demonstration of competence by a practitioner--at least in any predictable manner--is so broad that the time and effort which would be required would be, as Maxwell has charged with regard to the CBE and PBE movement in teacher education, " a shameful waste of mental and materials resources which could be put to better use."[12] If thorough attention cannot be given to needed assessment and research functions, it might be better to leave the task untouched. No assessment evidence other than that which is presently being used, coupled with a continued reliance on intuition and professional judgement, is probably better than the proliferation of fragmentary and meaningless assessment or research efforts which fail to identify the presence or absence of linkages between the exit criteria established for a preparation program and subsequent judgements which are made about administrator competence.

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[12]W. David Maxwell, "PBTE: A Case of the Emperor's New Clothes," Phi Delta Kappan, LV (January, 1974), 306-311.